

## Opening plenary UN Environment Assembly UNEA-6

Nairobi, 26 February 2024

Dear chair and delegates,

My name is Rebecca Okello, Climate Policy Advisor at the Central Organization of Trade Unions in Kenya (COTU-K). I'm speaking on behalf of the workers and trade unions major group coordinated by the International Trade Union Confederation. The ITUC represents 340 trade unions from 169 countries with a total membership of nearly 200 million workers worldwide.

For nearly ten years we are working with our trade union members in Kenya on climate and environment issues. We have a very active network of green worker representatives that have been trained to deal with negative impacts on the work floor. The impact of drought, heat stress, the use of dangerous chemical products has become central concerns of our members. Our members are directly affected by the non-inclusive environmental policies.

I want to stress to all of you that workers and their trade unions are part of the solution. Our contribution to better policies is called Just Transition. The way we implement Just Transition policies has been defined at the International Labour Organization's (ILO) and its Guidelines which were only last year confirmed by the ILO's 187 Member States, employers and trade unions. Dear environment ministers, we invite you strongly to check with your colleagues, the labour ministers on the implementation of Just Transition policies.

We want to make 2 concrete suggestions for the work here at UNEA –6 this week:

1. We need a strong call to ban the use of chrysotile asbestos in the chemicals and waste resolution. The appalling inability of the Rotterdam Convention to ban chrysotile asbestos is leading to 250.000 workers dying every year. This must stop.
2. The global trade union movement supports very strongly the inclusion of a paragraph on Just Transition in the circular economy and minerals and metals resolutions. We want to stress however that a Just Transition is important for all workers in the circular economy value chain. This includes all formal and informal workers, not only the waste pickers.

Dear delegates, finally, I want to echo the words of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres: "We cannot stay silent about the unresolved question of Palestine and the enormous violence and suffering caused by both sides. Over 26,750 Palestinians have reportedly been killed in Gaza – more than two-thirds women and children."

We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and a sustainable solution for this terrible conflict.

Thank you.